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UNCLAS ABUJA 000727

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA ELECTIONS -- THE VIEW FROM THE QUEUE

1. Winding down Shehu Shagari Way in Abuja to an AP station opposite the Hilton is a fuel queue that varies between 300 and 1700 meters. Motorists favor this queue because the AP station often has fuel and because the gentle slope of the final 900 meters means no need to start engines. On Monday evening, the queue was just under one kilometer.

2. DCM stopped at every fourth vehicle where the driver was outside to solicit views on the April 19 elections. Of 43 persons polled, just five preferred not to comment. The other 38 overwhelmingly commended the peaceful conduct of voting, in some cases expressing relief that things had gone as well as they had. Relatively few (about a dozen) volunteered unease or unhappiness about electoral malfeasance. These included the most voluble interlocutors; just four called the process "bad," however. Only one person mentioned the name of any of the major candidates, and that was to call President Obasanjo by his nickname, Baba. Another said he would have voted ANPP if Rochas Okorocha had been that party's candidate, but he had voted PDP since Rochas was not a candidate.

3. A plurality of those interviewed offered that God decided who would govern Nigeria. God did not make mistakes, and so the person declared the winner was God's choice. They would now pray that the chosen leader would do the right thing. A major (if obvious) concern for those in the queue was that the leader address fuel shortages.

4. COMMENT: The people in the fuel queue represent a cross-section of "ordinary Nigerians" living in Abuja. They do not have access to special fuel supplies and are not rich enough to hire someone else to stand in for them (however, a number were drivers for people wealthy enough to hire them). The almost overwhelming emphasis on the importance of peaceful elections (virtually everyone willing to talk mentioned it) was remarkable, and it suggests that calls for "mass action" to protest questionable results that heavily favor the PDP may not resonate to the extent that some in the opposition would like. The conviction that God would make the right choice for Nigeria should surprise no one familiar with the centrality of faith to Nigerian society. For them, whether the elections represent the "will of the Nigerian people" matters little, for the will of God is self-evident.

5. COMMENT CONTINUED: Those most inclined to voice detailed objections to the conduct or results of the elections were from the Southeast. Northern Muslims particularly tended to express faith in God and submission to His will, though one said several times that the elections were "bad" but declined to say much more. Two people from the Southwest expressed at least a measure of unhappiness with the AD's downfall, but the rest appeared not to care. END COMMENT.

6. NOTE: The percentage of Muslims among those sampled may have been reduced somewhat by the timing of the survey, which took place during a period that included two prayer times; DCM did not address those who were praying or preparing to do so.

JETER